

A ONE-MAN DIOCESE? EUGENIUS, AUTHOR AND ARCHITECT OF THE EPISCOPAL SEE OF ARDMORE

¿UNA DIÓCESIS UNIPERSONAL? EUGENIUS, AUTOR Y ARQUITECTO DE LA SEDE EPISCOPAL DE ARDMORE

Richard Harrington¹

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Abstract

In the twelfth century, the church of Ardmore, in the south of Ireland, made a unilateral bid for diocesan independence. It met with short-lived success, despite opposition from reformers and synods that sought to formalise and reduce the number of dioceses. This paper examines the career of Eugenius, the only named bishop of Ardmore, through a study of the documentary sources to demonstrate the extent to which the achievements of a marginal church could be shaped by individual actors and their personal relationships.

Keywords

Anglo-Normans; Bishops; Church reform; Hagiography; Ireland; twelfth century.

Resumen

En el siglo XII, la iglesia de Ardmore, en el sur de Irlanda, apostó por su independencia diocesana. Tuvo un éxito breve, a pesar de la oposición de los reformadores eclesiásticos y a los sínodos que buscaron formalizar y reducir el número de diócesis. Este trabajo examina la carrera de Eugenius, el único obispo de Ardmore identificado por su nombre, a través de un estudio de las fuentes documentales para demostrar en qué medida los agentes individuales y sus relaciones personales podían dar forma a los logros de una iglesia al margen.

1. University College Cork (Irlanda). C.e.: 113328271@umail.ucc.ie

Palabras clave

Anglo-Normandos; obispos; reforma de la Iglesia; hagiografía; Irlanda; siglo XII.

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EUGENIUS, bishop of Ardmore, presided over a fleeting golden age that saw his church lifted from relative obscurity to achieve the dignity of a diocesan see late in the twelfth century. His career has never before been examined in its entirety, and to do so requires scraping together a scattering of sources that provide only incidental testimony to the details of his life and the circumstances of his career. These sources demonstrate that Eugenius was an ambitious, dynamic and skilful leader who was instrumental in Ardmore's climb to diocesan stature. A proper treatment of his career is therefore fundamental to understanding how Ardmore, a poorly documented monastic centre, won acknowledgement of its self-endowed status and, for a short time, sustained its independence amid great upheaval and against powerful rivals.²

Ardmore lay at the southern end of the kingdom of Déisi Muman, on the south coast of Ireland, in what is now County Waterford. It claimed to be a very ancient monastery, established by Saint Declan shortly before Saint Patrick began his episcopal career in Ireland. Despite the monumental legacy that it alleged for itself, in the twelfth century Ardmore was a very marginal church in a country that was experiencing dramatic change. The programme of Gregorian reform had reached Ireland slightly later than the rest of Western Europe, but it was enthusiastically embraced by a committed group of reformers that included senior churchmen and the most powerful provincial kings.³ These reformers proposed an overhaul of the structure of the Irish Church that would bring it in line with continental norms. One change which was to be particularly impactful was the introduction, or formalisation, of the territorial diocese.⁴ Before this period, ecclesiastical power rested primarily in the great monasteries, where the office of abbot or church head fulfilled the church's administrative functions. The pre-reform role of bishop was much more pastoral in orientation. Its priorities were the good and canonical running of the life of the Church, incorporating powers of ordination and judgement within clear territorial spheres. These territories were not so extensive or enduring as the territorial dioceses set out in the course of the twelfth

2. This paper presents some findings from a doctoral thesis being undertaken at University College Cork. I am grateful to my supervisor, Dr Damian Bracken, to Dr Jesse Patrick Harrington, to the organisers and participants at the Burgos Congress and especially to my anonymous reviewer for their helpful comments which have helped to refine this paper.

3. The intent and extent of this 'reform,' itself a loaded term, have been heavily debated. Perhaps the two works most representative of this difference in interpretation, down to their very titles, are those by Flanagan and Ó Corráin: Flanagan, Marie Therese: *The transformation of the Irish Church in the twelfth century*. Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 2010; Ó Corráin, Donnchadh: *The Irish Church, its reform and the English invasion*. Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2017.

4. Citations in earlier canonical literature and examples from across pre-reform Ireland demonstrate that, in line with the standards that twelfth-century synods proposed to institute across the Irish Church, there existed clearly the idea of the territorial bishop, and some idea of an episcopal hierarchy and jurisdictional areas of defined limits. They show, moreover, that such ideas were exercised, to varying extents, substantially before the twelfth century. As such, territorialisation itself was not an innovation, but its introduction on a national scale, and the enduring boundaries it aimed to draw up, set the reform apart from these previous experiences: Etchingham, Colmán: «Bishops in the early Irish Church: a reassessment», *Studia Hibernica*, 28 (1994), pp. 35-62; *idem*: «Episcopal hierarchy in Connacht and Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair», *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, 52 (2000), pp. 13-29.

century, however.⁵ Ireland additionally preserved the office of *conepiscopus*, or *chorepiscopus*, a subordinate episcopal office that was ideally suited to the rural population distribution in Ireland, which had few settlements that resembled continental cities.⁶ These two differences led to a great abundance of bishops: one church synod of the early twelfth century was attended by as many as fifty-seven bishops, and there may have been absentees besides.⁷ That number was destined to reduce dramatically in the processes of redefinition and territorialisation, to about twenty-four or twenty-six diocesan bishops, through the decisions of synods and jostling among churches in the interims. Many of these new diocesan sees were instituted, or indeed remained, at monastic churches that were already prestigious or powerful. Often, too, episcopal power was situated close to a regional ruler who could thereby exercise his influence more easily. This could be a symbiotic relationship, as secular patrons with an interest in maintaining their diocesan church's territory and authority richly endowed the churches under their jurisdiction. Other churches, some with very ancient pedigrees, had attempted to gain independence, only to be suppressed or reabsorbed by their more powerful neighbours: for example, Mungret, punitively suppressed by Limerick and its patrons, the Uí Briain kings of Thomond; and Inis Cathaig, a small island in the Shannon estuary, that managed a brief diocesan existence before being carved up once more among Ardfert, Killaloe and Limerick. It is thus remarkable that a church like Ardmore could have achieved the degree of success that it did. It was seemingly politically unimportant, with no meaningful connections attested with the local or regional dynasties, and its very existence is barely acknowledged in the documentary sources. Under the schemes drawn up at the major synods, Ardmore fell into the territory of Lismore, whose bishop, Christianus (Gilla Críst) Ua Connairche, was papal legate in Ireland in the third quarter of the century and among the most influential men in Ireland. Compared to other church centres, particularly Lismore, references to Ardmore are scarce, as the following chronological survey demonstrates, with only one non-hagiographical reference

5. This is not to understate the importance of bishops in the operation of a church: church head was not a necessarily clerical position, and it was from the bishop's dignity that his church derived its status. While these two offices of bishop and church head remained separate in theory, they could be and very often were unified in one person (as is the case in almost half of annalistic entries reviewed by Etchingham): Etchingham, Colmán: «Bishops in the early Irish Church: a reassessment»... pp. 48-49, 61.

6. Etchingham, Colmán: «Bishops in the early Irish Church: a reassessment»... pp. 52-53; Ó Corráin, Donnchadh: «Irish vernacular law and the Old Testament», in Ní Chatháin, Próinséas and Richter, Michael (eds), *Irland und die Christenheit: Bibelstudien und Mission*. Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1987, p. 306; *idem*: *The Irish Church, its reform and the English invasion*... pp. 6-8.

7. AI 1111.3 records the attendance of «a fair fifty bishops» (*l. coem [ep]sc[op]*) and three hundred priests, figures which seem to have been rounded for poetic reasons. LC 1111.6 likewise records fifty bishops, «*uel paulo plus*,» with three hundred priests and three thousand students accompanying them. ATig 1111.6 confidently records the attendance of fifty-seven bishops, three hundred and eighteen priests and twenty-seven deacons. CS 1111 offers the questionable figure of one hundred and fifty bishops, which should probably be understood as including those of certain, lower clerical grades.

to the church before 1152.⁸ It seems unlikely that anyone in the first half of the twelfth century would have envisaged Ardmore becoming a diocesan see.

This is certainly the impression given by the first mention in this period of the church of Ardmore, which evidently comes somewhat *in media res*, as the earliest glimpse we get of Ardmore's campaign for diocesan standing is of its failure. This was at the 1152 synod of Kells-Mellifont, whose president was the Roman cardinal-priest and papal legate John Paparo. Also in attendance was Lismore's bishop Christianus, who had accompanied John to Ireland with his own commission as native papal legate. John conferred pallia on the four archbishops, and the synod produced a list of approved dioceses. Representatives of two other churches said that they ought to have bishops of their own. These claims were obviously regarded with scepticism and did not meet with success, as a note following the suffragans of Cashel shows:

Due autem ecclesie. sunt sub eodem archiepiscopo que dicunt se habere debere episcopos quorum nomina sunt haec. Ardmore et mungarath.

«There are however two churches under the same archbishop [i.e. Cashel] which say that they ought to have bishops of which the names are these: Ardmore and Mungret.»⁹

The first mention of Eugenius himself occurs somewhat later, about the year 1170. He was then the abbot of Ardmore, and he was witnessing a royal charter for an Augustinian house in Cork. Excellent work on his somewhat anomalous appearance on the charter has been done by Marie Therese Flanagan and Dónal O'Connor.¹⁰

In 1171 or 1172, an unnamed bishop of Ardmore swore fealty to Henry II of England at a church council held at Cashel by Henry and his supporters. This bishop, who should probably not be identified with Eugenius, was one of many Irish nobles and churchmen to do so at that time.¹¹ The presence of Ardmore's representatives here suggests that this minor church had looked over the horizon to find a new vehicle to success. Concrete evidence of this appears in 1184 and 1185, when the English pipe rolls record Eugenius in the diocese of Lichfield, in the west of England, for six months.¹² Here, salaried by the English exchequer, he

8. This is the 'Tallaght memoir' or 'Monastery of Tallaght' text, which Follett has dated to about 840: Gwynn, Edward J. and Purton, W. J. (eds): «The Monastery of Tallaght», *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 29 (1911-1912), pp. 115-179; Follett, Westley: *Céli Dé in Ireland: monastic writing and identity in the early middle ages*. Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 2006, p. 108.

9. Lawlor, H. J.: «A fresh authority for the synod of Kells, 1152», *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 36 (1921-1924), pp. 17-18.

10. Flanagan, Marie Therese: *Irish royal charters: texts and contexts*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 180-181, 198; O'Connor, Dónal: «Eugenius, bishop of Ardmore and suffragan at Lichfield (1184-5)», *Decies: Journal of the Waterford Archaeological & Historical Society*, 60 (2004), pp. 71-90; *idem*: «Bishop Eugene of Ardmore revisited», *Decies: Journal of the Waterford Archaeological and Historical Society*, 63 (2007), pp. 25-28.

11. For a discussion of the motivations of the Irish bishops at this council, see Flanagan, Marie Therese: «Henry II, the council of Cashel and the Irish bishops», *Peritia*, 10 (1996), pp. 184-211.

12. «The Great Roll of the Pipe for the thirty-first year of the reign of King Henry the Second, A.D. 1184-1185», *Pipe Roll Society Publications* 34, London, 1913, pp. 24, 124, 142; O'Connor, Dónal: «Eugenius, bishop of Ardmore»... pp. 76-79; *idem*: «Bishop Eugene of Ardmore revisited»... pp. 23-24, 28-29.

was serving as a caretaker between the death of Lichfield's bishop Gerard Pucelle and the election of his successor. We know of no episcopal *acta* for Eugenius while he was in Lichfield, but he was clearly performing an important service for the Angevin administration and, significantly, he is described here for the first time as bishop of Ardmore.¹³

The next reference to Ardmore occurs in a hagiographical work from either Melrose, in southern Scotland, or Durham, in northern England.¹⁴ This is the *Libellus de ortu sancti Cuthberti*, which has been dated to the 1190s and is the earliest known source to allege an Irish ancestry for the Northumbrian saint Cuthbert.¹⁵ In support of this fabricated genealogy, the *Libellus* claimed the improbable testimony of numerous Irish bishops from decades prior, including Saint Malachy, archbishop of Armagh, who had died in 1148; but the author also cited the testimony of Eugenius, bishop of Ardmore, and did so in a way that suggested he was personally acquainted with him.

Then, writing in 1200, Gerald of Wales (or Giraldus Cambrensis), a cleric from a family of Norman adventurers, travelled to Rome to argue a case before Innocent III.¹⁶ Gerald reminded the pope that, just the year before, «a good Irish bishop» (*bonus episcopus Hibernensis*) had visited Rome and spoken on his behalf. That bishop, he reported, had since died. Although Gerald did not identify this bishop or his see in writing, this paper will argue later that he should be identified with Eugenius.

In 1203, there is a brief obituary in the Annals of Inisfallen, which reads, «Máel Étaín Ua Duib Rátha, noble priest of Ardmore, died after finishing building the church of Ardmore.»¹⁷ This is generally taken to refer to the completion of the diocesan cathedral, a responsibility Máel Étaín may have shouldered upon the death of the bishop, and is an indication of the longevity of Ardmore's programme of construction and self-endowment with the trappings of episcopacy.

The last mention of diocesan Ardmore before it fades into obscurity dates to 1210, when Innocent III sent a letter to the archbishop of Cashel enumerating his

13. Franklin, M. J.: *English Episcopal Acta 17, Coventry and Lichfield, 1183-1208*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, xxvii-xxviii.

14. Marner, Dominic: *St Cuthbert: his life and cult in medieval Durham*. London, The British Library, 2000, pp. 25-36; Clancy, Thomas Owen: «Maggie hagiography in twelfth-century Scotland: the case of *Libellus de nativitate sancti Cuthberti*», in Cartwright, Jane (ed.): *Celtic hagiography and saints' cults*. Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2003, pp. 228-229; Crumplin, Sally: *Rewriting history in the cult of St Cuthbert from the ninth to the twelfth centuries* (unpublished doctoral dissertation), University of St Andrews, 2004, pp. 254-255; *eadem*: «Cuthbert, the cross-border saint», in Boardman, Stephen, Davies, John Reuben and Williamson, Ella (eds): *Saints' cults in the Celtic world*. Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 2009, pp. 126-127. Incidental references (such as in Flanagan, Marie Therese: *Irish royal charters...*) usually give the text a Durham origin, but the above works show that the evidence favours a Scottish Cistercian house, in which context Melrose is the most likely candidate.

15. Raine, James (ed.): «Miscellanea biographica: Oswinus, rex Northumbriae, Cuthbertus, episcopus Lindisfarnensis, Eata, episcopus Haugustaldensis», *Surtees Society* 8, London, 1838, ix-x, pp. 63, 72-73, 87.

16. Davies, W. S., (ed.): «De invectionibus», *Y Cymmrodor*, 30 (1920), p. 87.

17. Al 1203,5.

suffragan bishops. Among them was the bishop of Ardmore.¹⁸ This is the pinnacle of Ardmore's long campaign for recognition, but it is also the last time we hear of Ardmore as a diocese. Indeed, it probably disappeared not too long afterward, so, once again, the question to be asked is this: how did Ardmore achieve this fleeting success? Ardmore in the twelfth century seemed destined to be annexed, whether by its more prestigious neighbour, the diocese of Lismore, or by the assertive new arrivals in the Anglo-Norman stronghold of Waterford. The see of Waterford had first been established in 1096 as a concession to the independent Hiberno-Norse population of that city, and its survival through repeated synods that intended to allocate just one see for Déisi Muman seems due to indecision rather than any change to the initial plan. Under Anglo-Norman leadership, Waterford, initially confined to the city's hinterland, made significant encroachments into the territory of Lismore, and the two sees remained locked in conflict for several decades.¹⁹ It may be partially because Lismore's authority over Déisi Muman was compromised and incomplete that Ardmore was able to maintain an independent existence.

The recurring figure in these sources is Eugenius, and he is the key to understanding the labours of this loose-cannon diocese. There are few documentary sources to evidence his life or the history of his church, which obliges us to engage in a comprehensive examination of each. Such a study, although it is somewhat of a jigsaw puzzle, yields a reinterpretation of the agency of peripheral Irish churches and the ability of dynamic and ambitious leaders like Eugenius to move those churches from the margins to the centre of secular and ecclesiastical power structures. The glimpses we get of Eugenius's life allow us to piece together some of this puzzle. From his testimony in the *Libellus*, we know that he was born in Meath, in the east of the country, and that he was educated in that province. He was probably an Augustinian by training. He spent some time in Ardmore as its abbot but had become bishop by 1184. It would be timely to say something here of his move from Meath to Ardmore. It echoes the foundation tale of Ardmore, which had been established by Saint Declan in the early fifth century. An independent narrative known as the *Expulsion of the Déisi*, dating to the eighth century and preserved in several later manuscripts including one from the early twelfth century, told how the Déisi, Declan's ancestors, were driven from their homeland in Meath and wandered south before establishing the kingdom of Déisi Muman.²⁰ The tradition of this connection between Meath and Déisi Muman was alive and well in Eugenius's time. Indeed, a sizeable portion of the narrative is incorporated, heavily reworked and with significant innovations,

18. Sheehy, Maurice P. (ed.): *Pontificia Hibernica: medieval papal chancery documents concerning Ireland, 640-1261*. Dublin, Gill, 1965, pp. 140-142.

19. Dunning, P. J.: «Pope Innocent III and the Waterford-Lismore controversy, 1198-1215», *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 28:3 (1961), pp. 215-232.

20. Meyer, Kuno (ed. and trans.): «The expulsion of the Déisi», *Y Cymmrodor*, 14 (1901), pp. 101-135.

into the *Life of Saint Declan*, which may have been written by Eugenius himself.²¹ This inclusion probably served multiple purposes, among which was to remind both his community and his patrons that Eugenius was very much following in the footsteps of the founder and patron saint. The belief in this sort of common origin of founder and successor, whether real or imagined, could be very important to legitimise a non-local bishop: for example, it was highlighted in the *vita* of Lismore's patron, Saint Carthage, and deliberately fabricated in the *vita* of Cork's patron, Saint Finbarr, to stave off protests from the community about the installation of a bishop from Connacht.²² The *Life of Saint Declan*, like so many of its contemporaries, was artfully designed to legitimise Ardmore's claims to diocesan stature, through emphatic validation by kings, by Saint Patrick and by the papacy. Key themes include Declan's right to patronage over the entire Déisi kingdom and his roles as kingmaker and as a second Moses or second Patrick, all of which are made explicit. A verse in Irish, for example, is translated by the author as declaring «*Declanus secundus Patricius et patronus esset na n-Desi*» («that Declan is a second Patrick and patron of the Déisi»).²³ Political hagiography like this was not intended to be read only by the monks: it was composed with a sponsor in mind, someone who could help Ardmore achieve its ambitious goals. Jefferies and O'Connor have argued independently that Ardmore was promoted as a see by two successive ruling families of Déisi Muman, the Uí Bric in the mid-twelfth century and the Uí Faeláin in the last quarter of the century, respectively;²⁴ but the *vita*, which features a lengthy exposition of Declan's birth-right, a fraternity with the chief Welsh church and repeated appeals to the authority of Ardmore's metropolitan, seems designed to speak also to a non-Déisi audience.²⁵

21. For this attribution see, for example, Sharpe, Richard: *Medieval Irish saints' lives: introduction to Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1981, p. 32. The recycling of this narrative is discussed in Ó Cathasaigh, Tomás: «On the genealogical preamble to *Vita sancti Declani*», in Carey, John, Murray, Kevin and Ó Dochartaigh, Cairíona (eds): *Sacred histories: a Festschrift for Máire Herbert*. Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2015, pp. 291-300.

22. Plummer, Charles (ed.): *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae: partim hactenus ineditae ad fidem codicum manvscriptorum recognovit prolegomenis notis indicibus instrvit*. Oxford, 1910, vol. I, pp. 187-188, §45; Ó Riain, Pádraig: «The making of a saint: Finbarr of Cork, 600-1200», *ITS Subsidiary Series* 5, London, 1977, pp. 66-67. The relevant episode in Carthage's *vita* sees two British monks of Lismore's community plot to drown the saint and elect one of their countrymen to succeed him. The attempt is interrupted by another monk, who, like Carthage, is of the Ciarraige, and Carthage promises that no Briton will ever be among his successors, who will all be «*de gente Chiaraigi*.» The effect is twofold, legitimising bishops such as Christianus Ua Connairche, of Ciarraige Luachra, and excluding Anglo-Norman interlopers such as those at the nearby, rival see of Waterford.

23. Plummer, Charles (ed.): *op. cit.* pp. 43, 47-48, §§16, 21.

24. Jefferies, Henry A.: «Desmond before the Norman invasion», *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, 89:248 (1984), p. 17; O'Connor, Dónal: «Bishop Eugene of Ardmore revisited»... pp. 24-25. Ardmore's relationship with the rulers of Déisi Muman is evidenced only indirectly. These families were seemingly excluded from a position of influence at Lismore, which was notionally the main church of Déisi Muman, by the Uí Briain kings of Thomond and the Mac Carthaig kings of Desmond, and it is on this basis that the Uí Bric (per Jefferies), and then the Uí Faeláin (per O'Connor), supported Ardmore as an alternative see. Both say it only in passing; the contemporary politics of Déisi Muman will be subject to a more extended study in my forthcoming doctoral thesis.

25. Note, for example, that the verse quoted above is translated by the *vita's* writer in order to give «... *modicam de sensu eius indicacionem nescientibus scoticam linguam*...». Plummer, Charles (ed.): *op. cit.* pp. 47-48, §21.

Eugenius was certainly active in courting new support for Ardmore's agenda, and not just in Ireland. That said, it is not entirely clear what first brought him to England. It has been suggested that he is a classic, if early, example of the impoverished Irish bishop travelling overseas to earn a living.²⁶ The evidence, however, does not support this interpretation. Ardmore at this time was embarked on multiple dramatic building projects. It erected a round tower which is possibly the most attractive and innovative example still standing in Ireland. It expanded its modest church into a cathedral built in the native Hiberno-Romanesque architectural style, with a set of elaborate sculptural motifs on its western wall that depict Biblical scenes in support of its aspirations.²⁷ It also appears to have been, or worked to become, a pilgrimage centre, with a near-contemporary church built at the site reputed to be Declan's hermitage, or *desertulum*. The layout of the core monastic city is somewhat incoherent, which has led Tadhg O'Keeffe to suggest, very plausibly, that the round tower was built between two phases of cathedral-building, probably by Eugenius's predecessor.²⁸ The programme of construction at Ardmore was clearly a long-term one, carried through by multiple leaders over a period of thirty years or more. Projects like these would not have been possible if Ardmore did not control a viable diocese or if it lacked a benefactor who could fund them. In short, Ardmore does not appear to have been too poor to support a bishop. It was not financial but political necessity that drew Eugenius to Lichfield. Specifically, he was there to forge and exploit new relationships with the Angevin administration. His service fits far too perfectly to be mere happenstance. The previous bishop of Lichfield, Gerard Pucelle, had been very pro-Augustinian, and his successor, Hugh de Nonant, was vehement in his hatred of monks: after a violent confrontation with the monks of Coventry Cathedral, one of the diocese's two cathedrals, Hugh reportedly exclaimed, «To the devil with monks,» an outburst which well encapsulates the setting in which Eugenius found himself at Lichfield.²⁹ The cathedral chapter at Lichfield was composed of canons who were locked in a bitter feud with the monks of the chapter of Coventry. With the see officially vacant for several years, it was vital that Lichfield Cathedral's chapter of Augustinians should have a sympathetic bishop to

26. Franklin, M. J.: *op. cit.* xxvii-xxviii.

27. The symbolism of this figure sculpture has been subject to a great deal of study in the past fifty years: Smith, J. T.: «Ardmore cathedral», *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 102:1 (1972), pp. 1-13; McNab, S. L.: «The Romanesque sculptures of Ardmore cathedral, Co. Waterford», *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 117 (1987), pp. 50-68; O'Keeffe, Tadhg: «Romanesque architecture and sculpture at Ardmore», in Nolan, William and Power, Thomas P. (eds): *Waterford history & society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county*. Dublin, Geography Publications, 1992, pp. 73-104; Harbison, Peter: «Architectural sculpture from the twelfth century at Ardmore», *Irish Arts Review Yearbook* 11, 1995, pp. 96-102; O'Keeffe, Tadhg: *Romanesque Ireland: architecture, sculpture and ideology in the twelfth century*. Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2003, pp. 166-230; O'Connor, Dónal: «The iconography of the southern lunette in Ardmore cathedral, Co. Waterford», *Decies: Journal of the Waterford Archaeological and Historical Society*, 64 (2008), pp. 23-40.

28. O'Keeffe, Tadhg: «Romanesque architecture and sculpture at Ardmore», pp. 81-85.

29. Gervase of Canterbury: «The chronicle of the reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I», in Stubbs, William (ed.): «The historical works of Gervase of Canterbury», *Rolls Series* 73, London, 1879, vol. I, p. 470.

facilitate the diocese's smooth functioning. Eugenius was an ideal candidate and, though it is not immediately clear what or who initially brought him to England, his custodianship demonstrably had a specific purpose. In travelling to England he may have been inspired by his contemporaries who did so looking for political gain, like the bishop of Louth, who just two years earlier travelled to the nearby port of Chester, visited with its administrators and was promoted soon after to the archdiocese of Armagh.³⁰ Of course, Eugenius was not simply a self-serving careerist, and he was prepared at every opportunity to speak of his adoptive diocese in glowing terms. When he conversed, or perhaps corresponded, with the author of that *Libellus* of Cuthbert's birth, he described Ardmore as the resting place of the miracle-working bishop Declan. His collaborator, who was probably a Cistercian of Melrose, described Eugenius as «a man of holy conversation and opinion.»³¹ While the author was probably just hoping to make his fabrication a bit more credible, this seems like quite a glowing endorsement of Eugenius's reformed and orthodox credentials, and his credentials are indeed credible. He had been educated in Meath, a province which was a cradle of Irish reform, and he claimed personal knowledge of several Meath churches: not just Cuthbert's supposed birthplace in Kells, itself an important reform centre, but also Kildegan, a church where, according to the *Life of Saint Declan*, Declan's gospel-book was still held in high honour.³² Charter evidence suggests that Kildegan was an Augustinian house or property that enjoyed Anglo-Norman patronage, by the powerful de Lacy family and their followers.³³

One other account in the *Life* bears consideration in relation to Eugenius's contacts. The *Life* states that Declan travelled several times to Rome and emphasises that on one such journey he returned through the city of St David's, in Wales. Although Saint David himself lived about a century after Declan's reputed floruit, the two are made contemporaries in the *Life*, wherein they establish a perpetual bond of brotherhood between themselves and their successors.³⁴ It has been argued that anachronistic episodes such as this in hagiography were generally intended to resonate with some present-day reality, and this case is likely no different. St David's was the nearest point in Britain to Ardmore, and just a day's walk from the important harbour at Milford Haven. Given that Eugenius is known to have travelled between Britain and Ireland, it is likely that he visited St David's at least once. This introduces the possibility that he could have known Gerald of Wales, the archdeacon of Brecon who spent most of his career yearning to become bishop of St David's and to have that church elevated to metropolitan status, despite opposition from Henry II and

30. Smith, Brendan: *Colonisation and conquest in medieval Ireland: the English in Louth, 1170-1330*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 25-26, 31.

31. Dodds, Madeleine Hope (ed. and trans.): «The little book of the birth of Saint Cuthbert», *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 6 (1929), p. 65.

32. Plummer, Charles (ed.): *op. cit.* p. 51, §26.

33. Gilbert, John T. (ed.): «Register of the abbey of St Thomas, Dublin», *Rolls Series* 94, London, 1889, pp. 7-9, 14, 26-27.

34. Plummer, Charles (ed.): *op. cit.* pp. 38-39, 41, §§9, 15.

Archbishop Baldwin of Canterbury. Indeed, so fixated was Gerald on ascending to this position that he travelled to Rome, multiple times, to bypass his opponents and petition Innocent III directly for the appointment. On one occasion already mentioned, he reminded Innocent that a «good Irish bishop,» who had regularly travelled through St David's and thus knew Gerald well, had spoken in support of his petition. This bishop, Gerald said, had died in 1199. There are no known Irish bishops who fit this description, other than the subject of this paper, and there is no known vacancy in any episcopal succession that could suit this passing obituary. Dunning, stymied by the dearth of vacant sees, posited that Gerald meant an unattested bishop of Waterford, whom Dunning used to fill out a period of uncertain succession in that see.³⁵ This is unnecessary and a grant by bishop Robert I of Waterford (d. 1204) in 1195 makes it untenable. An ideal candidate already exists in Eugenius, whom we know to have fostered ties with English and Scottish churches and whose adoptive church and kingdom claimed ancient ties to Dyfed and its cathedral church.³⁶ Moreover, the 1203 obituary of Máel Étaín, who completed the cathedral, suggests that there had been a recent break in the episcopal succession at Ardmore. If bishop Eugenius travelled to Rome early in Innocent's reign, this would have been a valuable opportunity to convince the papacy that Ardmore's unilateral bid for independence was valid. Other dioceses, like Ardmore's neighbour, Lismore, used audiences with the pope to stave off threats to their territory and their autonomy. We might recall that in 1210, Innocent III confirmed Ardmore as a diocese. Perhaps he did so on the basis of Eugenius's personal testimony.

Ardmore's success was not to last. The survival of this fragile diocese owed too much to the ambition and ability of bishop Eugenius, who attempted to solidify his church's tenuous position and in the process tread new ground in nurturing a network of political connections. Ardmore's failure to substantially outlast him is down to the same circumstances that later led Lismore's bishop to be kidnapped by Waterford's bishop and led Waterford's bishop to be murdered by the Déisi king. The kingdom of Déisi Muman was simply too small for two ambitious churches, let alone three. Ardmore's success was the product of a determined church administration and a singularly competent and enterprising bishop who built on the work of his predecessors to secure patronage and acknowledgement for his see as an independent church. In the face of the deep-running Lismore-Waterford feud it needed a similarly capable successor to make its success permanent, and there is no evidence of lightning striking twice at Ardmore.

35. Dunning, P. J.: *op. cit.* pp. 217-218.

36. Aside from the vow of fraternity between Declan and David, there was a received tradition, recorded in the *Expulsion of the Déisi* already discussed, that the Déisi had settled South Wales (of which St David's was later the chief church) during their wanderings south from Meath: Meyer, Kuno (ed. and trans.): «The expulsion of the Déisi»... pp. 112-113; Ó Cathasaigh, Tomás: «The Déisi and Dyfed», *Éigse*, 20 (1984), pp. 1-33.

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